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SUBJECT Daniel Schorr Interviews Robert McFarlane P

SCOTT SIMON: The former National Security Adviser to the President of the United States sat stern and stone-faced at the long table, answering questions. He sipped frequently from a glass of ice water and referred to documents in a thick loose-leaf binder. Some of those forced Robert McFarlane to confront discrepancies in earlier testimony he gave to Congress last year. He conceded that while under oath he had not given a full account of his involvement in raising funds for the Contra rebels in Nicaragua. On another day, Mr. McFarlane said he believed Lieutenant Colonel Oliver North regularly received instructions from the late CIA Director William Casey.

Yesterday, Weekend Edition Washington correspondent Daniel Schorr visited Robert McFarlane at his home in Bethesda, Maryland. We have added relevant moments from this week's hearings to that interview.

During one session of this week's hearings, Mr. McFarlane told lawmakers he was not a fragile flower. They should shoot their best shots and ask tough questions.

DANIEL SCHORR: Were you satisfied with the way you were questioned?

ROBERT MCFARLANE: I thought they asked me every question that needed to be asked, and many that were painful, but covered the waterfront very well, I think.

SCHORR: What seemed to me remarkable, because of the buildup for your appearance and whether you were going to make the President seem wrong, whether you were going to make Oliver North seem wrong, this was you letting everything hang out; and

when you were finished, they were going to all there be lying in ashes. Somehow, you managed to present yourself in a way where you didn't really appear to or want to, or maybe even effectively, harm anybody else you were associated with.

Was that your intention?

MCFARLANE: Well, yes. Because, to the best of my knowledge, nobody that I know of did anything truly mean or for personal gain. That doesn't justify everything that was done. But Ollie, I believe, always acted from what he believed to be the best interest of the country. And I know the President's motives were good. And I think it is a matter of his not being very well served by me and other people.

But you're right, Dan, that does mask that mistakes were made by all of us, me in particular. But I think the country, if not the Congress, is tolerant enough to forgive that, assuming that we learned some lessons from it.

SCHORR: I the end, there was an electric moment when the House Chairman, Lee Hamilton, delivered what I thought was a rather eloquent lecture to you about you can't protect the President. He was responsible, and not you.

REP. LEE HAMILTON: You spoke for the President, and the responsibility must rest with him, as well as with you. You cannot, it seems to me, accept responsibility for mistakes, as admirable as that may be, and thereby absolve the President of responsibility.

SCHORR: Have you thought about that?

MCFARLANE: Yes, I have. I think that that's a valid comment, but I think that the President feels responsibility. And I think that his comments will reflect that in the days and weeks ahead.

But I think that doesn't alter my own sense that most of the mistakes were mine.

SCHORR: Well, if most of the mistakes that you call yours were mistakes of not knowing what was going on, it seems to me, I certainly got an impression -- I must say I had the impression before, and I think you confirmed that impression -- that while you were the National Security Adviser, a lot of things were happening behind your back and over your head in a separate chain of command that ran through the CIA Director, Bill Casey, to Oliver North and out to Secord and others.

When you look back now -- I remember the last interview

you did. You said you were learning things that you didn't know. You know a lot more. Are you aware of how much was happening without you?

MCFARLANE: Well, Dan, I cannot be sure that I know today all the things that went on. Even that, however, is an error of my own. I mean most leaders have the ability to be confident that they will know what is going on in their own command.

I will say one thing that has only begun to form in my mind in the last few days, and I've never said this. I think that Bill Casey, a man of enormous self-confidence and conviction about right and wrong, may very well have recognized that he didn't have many years left, as long as two years ago. And with that knowledge confirmed for him, he determined that he wanted to do one or two things for which he knew he would have to accept history's judgment, but things that he believed were right and would benefit the country and his President. And I think there's a real possibility that the last testament for Bill Casey was a very, very driven one that some of us may not have fully understood.

SCHORR: Is that entirely surmisal, or do you have any reason to believe that was in his mind?

MCFARLANE: It's surmise entirely.

SCHORR: Well, is it not also true, or have you thought about it in these terms, that Bill Casey was in the very, very inner circle of President Reagan's friends, and you were never in that inner circle?

MCFARLANE: That's true. And yet I think that Bill was loyal enough to where if he was doing something that he knew the President could not countenance, even if he might want to, that Bill, out of loyalty, would take that on himself.

SCHORR: During the hearings you were as patient as Job through most of those 3 1/2 days. But about twice, maybe 2 1/2 times, you exploded in a kind of an anger that you could not longer keep hold of.

What were the things that would precipitate anger?

MCFARLANE: Well, the first time was inspired by the only breach that I saw of just detail and accuracy by the staff, which is a marvelous staff. I must say I've never been so impressed as I have by an attorney in Arthur Liman.

But on the matter that led to conclusions that were very

severe on my involvement in the preparation of the chronologies, there was just simply a misapprehension, an error in what the staff presented to the members, and that is that I was somehow involved for a week's time in contributing to that chronology. And the fact is that I was physically out of the city for five of seven days.

MCFARLANE [testifying]: Now, I'll be glad to answer questions all day. But is it not so that there has been until this moment the impression in this committee that I was involved, importantly, continuously, for sustained periods, in the preparation of the chronology, when in fact it's a matter of a matter of perhaps minutes, or hours, at most?

MCFARLANE: I think, on the whole, the hearings were conducted with great civility. But oftentimes they were so focused on the evidentiary trail as to miss the lessons, historic lessons, I think, about how the President and the Congress ought to deal with each other.

SCHORR: What was it about the hostage ransom project that set you off when the questions was asked?

MCFARLANE: Well, I think that it really was a sign of my own immaturity. And I say that because Warren Rudman is a man who understands the benefit of putting passion into a discourse or colloquy. But it was more his anger that goaded me.

MCFARLANE [testifying]: It is more than passing strange to me that we cannot aspire to a policy which is more effective to deal with terrorism. Now, it is undeniable that some countries are good at it. They are good because terrorists know that whenever they commit terrorism against Israel, something, somehow, somewhere, is going to happen.

Now, it may not always be arms. It may not be preemptive attack. It may be negotiation. It may be bribing. But you can be goddam sure if any Israeli is caught, he's going to have his government going after the people who did it.

SCHORR: You said at one point in the hearings, and I'm not sure how jokingly, that the special prosecutor wants to send you to jail. Are you in any jeopardy?

MCFARLANE: No, I don't think so. And I shouldn't have said it. It was interpreted as being satirical, but it really wasn't. I mean I am prepared to accept whatever responsibility is due, and to include the punishment that goes with it. And I was being challenged on that, that I would say I was broadly responsible, but not for anything culpable. Well, I am culpable, and I'll step up to that.

SCHORR: Well, if they're investigating what they call a conspiracy to defraud the government, a conspiracy to defeat the purposes of the Boland Amendment, then maybe you are part of that conspiracy. You said you did nothing evil or wrong. You never said you did nothing illegal.

MCFARLANE: Well, I feel strongly that I did nothing illegal. And I believe that that will be the verdict of the independent counsel.

SCHORR: Have they told you that you are off the hook?

MCFARLANE: No. I don't think they can. I think their proceedings have to run their course with all their witnesses before they reach conclusions.

SIMON: Former National Security Adviser Robert McFarlane, speaking yesterday with correspondent Daniel Schorr.